DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 208 856 IR 009 766

AUTHOR Nelson, Don
TITLE The Instructional Development Consultant as a Listener.
PUB DATE Apr 81
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (Philadelphia, PA, April 6-10, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Environment; *Classroom Observation Techniques; *Consultants; Evaluation Methods; Feedback; Higher Education; *Instructional Development; Instructional Innovation; *Listening; Teacher Behavior
IDENTIFIERS *University of Delaware

ABSTRACT

In an experimental project, a university instructional development consultant (IDC) provided consultation for a faculty client in a graduate course where the IDC was also enrolled as an auditing student. The course, Issues in Higher Education, was taught by a university administrator complementing his administrative responsibilities, and the students were candidates for a masters degree in counseling. The IDC also performed a third role, i.e., coordinating, setting up, and removing the audiovisual equipment used within the course. The unorthodox role of the IDC raised four major questions regarding (1) the instructor resenting the constant presence of the IDC; (2) the students feeling unusual pressures from the IDC/student's relationship to the instructor; (3) the IDC being able to relate effectively to the other students; and (4) the effectiveness of the IDC regularly attending classes rather than the usual sampling. The results of the informal project were highly positive, with the only apparent disadvantage being in the area of cost-effectiveness. The instructor, students, and IDC agreed that the experiment was worth the effort and resulted in many improvements in the instructional process. The responses of the instructor to 12 questions regarding this project are included. (CHC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED208856

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originat. ng it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

THE INSTRUCTIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANT AS A LISTENER

by

Don Nelson

IR009766

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Donald E. Nelson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

THE INSTRUCTIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANT AS A LISTENER

By: Don Nelson, Director
Instructional Resources Center
University of Delaware

Presented At:
AECT NATIONAL CONVENTION
Philadelphia, Pa.
April - 1981

Instructional development consultants (IDCs) have to listen a lot, and they have to talk too. They talk about student characteristics, course objectives, lecturing, discussing, questioning, examinations, teaching improvement, selection, and utilization of instructional media, grading and many other components of teaching and learning. IDCs listen to their clients carefully, to pick up the cues they need to make recommendations on improving the learning environment. In addition to that kind of listening, an IDC at the University of Delaware's Instructional Resources Center had been listening to and speaking with a new client - an administrator who was teaching a course, "Issues in Higher Education", for the first time, as one way of keeping his hand in the process of instruction. He had requested consultation from an IDC. As the interaction progressed, it became readily apparent to the IDC that, as had been the case with several other clients, he was more than slightly interested in the content of the course as well as those elements with which an instructional developer works. Although the IDC had been taking graduate credit courses beyond his Master's degree for several years, he was more recently into non-credit education, and wondered about the feasibility of registering as a listener/auditor for the course in which he would serve as an Instructional Consultant. It was obvious that there would be a conflict of interest if an IDC were to register in a course for credit while offering consultation to the instructor. However, would it work if, due to his interest in the subject matter, the IDC registered as a listener and documented the implications of his dual role? The instructor was in favor of the idea; the IDC felt that if nothing else, registering as a listener would motivate him to attend every class, rather than just a few sessions to observe the instructor, the students, and to operate a portable video tape recorder to enable the instructor to critique his teaching performance.

Many questions were raised before a final decision was made. Instructional development consulting is a sensitive task at best. Especially when an instructor is referred to an Instructional Developer by a Department Chair or Dean. Even in the case of a purely voluntary contact by a faculty member, the IDC is expected to maintain good rapport with his client and provide a wide range of constructive recommendations without threatening the client. Since, in this case, the IDC and the instructor were barely acquainted, another question raised by this proposed dual role concerned the instructor's feelings as to having his consultant present, in effect, as a member of his class and yet also as an instructional developer. Would this, in fact, be a threat to the instructor's performance in the classroom? Would he feel uncomfortable? How would other students in the class feel about having a person with this dual role in their midst? Should they be told during the first meeting of the course just what was going on or should it be more of a gradual explanation of the role of an IDC as a listener? And what about the consultant? How should he act in class? Should he completely refrain from asking questions and making comments about content or should he participate in a limited way as an auditor in many courses might?

Would the instructor - or the students for that matter - think that some of the IDC's questions or comments were inserted to cause certain behaviors on the part of the instructor or the students? Would the students resent the presence during each class of an IDC? Was the whole thing indeed worth trying? Might there be negative repercussions to the instructor, the students, and/or the relationship among them?

After discussing each of these issues, it was decided to try the scheme, with the understanding that if there appeared to be serious problems developing, the IDC would simply not be present at each class meeting. Since the other 13 students enrolled in the course were in a graduate counseling program, it was assumed that they should be able to accept such a combination without too much trauma. The IDC had consulted with the instructor on preparation of the syllabus, and had co-ordinated the production of a series of overhead transparencies which would be used during the course. The IDC volunteered to bring an overhead projector from a locked room, one floor above the regular classroom. He would set up the projector, check it out, and have it ready for operation at each meeting of the course. He also brought in and operated a portable video tape recorder several times to enable the instructor to view himself in the classroom. So the IDC acted not only as a consultant/listerner in the course, but also performed the function of a media specialist or instructional technologist.

One continuing IDC frustration concerns his/her image with faculty clients and students - especially if the consultant is attached to the campus audiovisual center. Many faculty members, and most students, consider an IDC to be a media specialist, rather than a person who specializes in applying a systematic approach to improving instruction. Early in the course, the question arose as to whether the student would develop a better understanding of the primary role of an IDC, especially when they saw the IDC/listener bringing in, setting up, adjusting, packing up and removing an overhead projector and other media equipment week after week. Would there be any significant spin-off from these masters in counseling candidates observing and interacting with an Instructional Consultant? Would they gain a better understanding of how instruction is organized, presented, and evaluated? If they did pick up such information,would it ever be of value to them? On the other hand, what kinds of things would the IDC/listener be learning about the process of instruction through this dual role?

How did the experiment work out? In the initial stages of IDC-instructor conversations, the consultant felt quite enthusiastic about experimenting with this combination of roles in this particular course since, to his knowledge, there was little if any reference in the literature about the pros and cons of serving as an instructional consultant while enrolled as listener. When looking at the possibility of playing a dual role as consultant and listener, it was hypothesized by the IDC that a better consulting job could be done through regular attendance at each class session, rather than at only a few sessions of the course. In retrospect, it would seem that the hypothesis was not proven. The principle is comparable to that of using a research sample versus an entire population. Of course, there is no control group against which to compare the results of consulting and listening in the same course. Yet, based on experience, it does appear that there is not a major advantage to the instructor or the consultant having the IDC present at each class meeting. By the same token, there do not appear to be any significant disadvantages to regular attendance. In fact, the instructor stated several times that he appreciated having the consultant present, since it constantly reminded him of his need to work toward improving his teaching. This factor did not appear to create any unusual stress on the part of the instructor.

The Consultant performed a third role which was to coordinate, set up, and remove the audiovisual equipment used within the course. This function was obviously advantageous to the instructor, since it meant that he had one less detail to be concerned about in the course management. However, such a service could not be justified on a regular basis.

What about interaction between the consultant/listener and the students enrolled in the course for credit? It appeared that the consultant was accepted by fellow students as would be any mature student in the course. Comments were made concerning the advantage to fellow students from occasionally hearing viewpoints and questions from a mature student who through over 20 years experience in higher education administration was able to add practical comments to classroom conversations. The consultant knew several of the guest speakers and made a limited number of comments concerning the content on those occasions. Members of the class never caused the consultant/listener to feel uncomfortable about participating in discussion.

As for feedback from the consultant to the instructor, there were very brief sessions several times during the semester during which specific comments were made concerning course organization, the dynamics of interaction in the classroom, other teaching/learning practices,and an IDC/student verbal feedback discussion. The verbal feedback session was one of the longest (45 minutes), ever conducted by the consultant. Undoubtedly, the rapport which had developed during the course of the semester between the consultant and fellow students had an impact on evaluation effectiveness.

As another part of the instructional development process, the instructor accepted the consultant's recommendation that a nationally-normed course evaluation instrument be administered to all students in the course (the IDEA system, developed by the Center for Higher Education at Kansas State University). Although the consultant participated in this evaluation, he decided not to submit his responses, along with those of other students in the course, since it was felt to do so might skew the results. The instructor and the consultant met when results of the evaluation were complete, to discuss the implications of the data and compare those data with the informal feedback received throughout the course and especially during the student feedback discussion session.

In summary, it appears that there were several advantages to the scheme described, and that the only apparent disadvantages were in the area of cost effectiveness. That is, the amount of time invested by the consultant/listener, compared to the results described. The instructor and the consultant agree that the experience was a worthwhile experiment.

THE EXPERIENCE OF TEACHING: ONE ADMINISTRATOR'S PERSPECTIVE

"University of Delaware Newsletter," April 14, 1980, pages 6 & 7

EDITOR'S NOTE: Dr. Douglas S. MacDonald, director of scholarships and student financial aid, joined the University professional staff in 1976 after teaching at Northern Virginia Community College, George Washington and Johns Hopkins universities and the Community College of Baltimore, and working with federal and state funding agencies. Dr. MacDonald designed a special graduate seminar on "Issures in Higher Education," which was offered for the second time in the fall of 1980. It was felt that Dr. MacDonald's experiences as an administrator/teacher and the cooperative effort of the Instructional Resources Center would be of interest to the campus community.

UNL: YOU CAME TO THE UNIVERSITY AS AN ADMINISTRATOR AFTER SEVERAL YEARS OF TEACHING. WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO RETURN TO TEACHING?

DSM: After serving several years in an administrative capacity, I decided I wanted more out of my higher education experience than one dimension; I wanted to make a different contribution to the University community. I thought that through the blending of classroom and administration I could offer an educational experience that would be an integrated one, especially for students of higher education. With the encouragment of Dr. John Bishop, director of the Center for Counseling, and the support of Dr. Robert Mayer, associate vice president for facilities management and services, and Dr. Claude Marks, associate professor of educational development, I proposed to teach a graduate-level course in the area of educational development in the Collge of Education. The course was offered during the fall semester of 1978.

UNL: WHAT DID THE COURSE COVER?

DSM: The seminar was designed as an introduction to and a study of the purposes, problems, policies and issues of American higher education. In the course, students had the opportunity to meet and mix with representatives of the higher education community.

UNL: AS AN ADMINISTRATOR, WHAT WAS INVOLVED IN "BECOMING" A FACULTY MEMBER?

DSM: My credentials had to be approved by both the general and the graduate faculties. That evaluation of my qualifications took approximately a year.

UNL: HOW DID YOU GO ABOUT DESIGNING THIS COURSE?

DSM: During my years at the University, I had developed a good working relationship with the Instructional Resources Center (IRC). As an administrator, I had utilized IRC in developing media materials for explaining the complexities of financial aid programs to prospective students and their parents. It was only natural, then, to explore the opportunities IRC offered for classroom use. The course began as a type of "experiment" between IRC and myself, a joint learning experience if you will. Don Nelson, IRC director, was enthusiastic about the course and, over and above his professional advice as an instructional development consultant, he enrolled as a listener. I was committed to being the best teacher I could be and offering the best possible course for the students. Given the breadth of the course topics, I felt that a team-teaching approach, utilizing guest lecturers, would provide the fullest learning experience for both the students and for myself.

UNL: WHAT TYPE OF ASSISTANCE DID IRC PROVIDE?

DSM: We exchanged ideas, brainstormed, reviewed films, edited material, organized classroom facilities, videotaped class interactions and worked closely together to assure that a relaxed educational atmosphere was established. My goal was to promote group discussion and interaction between the instructor, visiting lecturers and the students. I received advice and suggestions on my teaching techniques and on my presentations, such as giving brief answers, varying the volume of my voice and using brief pauses while speaking.

UNL: HOW WERE YOU ABLE TO HANDLE THE COMMITMENTS REQUIRED OF A FULL-TIME JOB PLUS A GRADUATE SEMINAR?

DSM: Because of limits on my time, the course had to be highly structured, while at the same time leaving room for change and experimentation. With assistance from IRC, I devised a syllabus that was very organized. It was self-explanatory to the students, so they knew the objectives of the course and what to expect. I also developed diverse grading methodologies for different aptitudes and determined how to evaluate students' participation, in order for the course to work, the planning required substantial preparation before actual instruction was offered. My financial aid colleagues supported me. However, from time to time I had to cope with the problems of overextension.

UNL: HOW IMPORTANT WAS THE EVALUATION PROCESS?

DSM: The evaluation process was very important since the whole course was an educational project. Feedback was encouraged, IRC did a formal comparative course evaluation, and Don Nelson did an informal verbal evaluation at the end of the course. Looking back, I see the course as both an integrated effort and an integrated experience with the exchange of expertise between Don and myself, plus the involvement of the students who, at the graduate level, were able to take on the responsibility of a partnership with myself and the visiting lecturers.

UNL: HAVING BEEN AWAY FROM TEACHING FOR A WHILE, DID YOU HAVE TO SPEND SOME TIME CATCHING UP ON RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE EDUCATION FIELD?

DSM: Yes, I read all of the applicable Carnegie Commission-sponsored research, as well as the texts I had chosen for the course - The Chronical of Higher Education, Change and Public Policy and Private Higher Education, among others. The reading requirement enabled me to keep abreast of current higher education developments that benefited me in my administrative responsibility as well as in my faculty role.

UNL: YOU MENTIONED EARLIER THE INVOLVEMENT OF REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMUNITY.

DSM: Yes. Guest lecturers were selected and invited to speak to the issues from a variety of perspectives. University of Delaware speakers included Dr. Carol Pemberton and Tony Graziano of institutional research and financial planning, who discussed grading and evaluation and financing higher education; John A. Murray, director of continuing education, who talked on lifelong learning; Dr. C. Harold Brown, vice president for personnel and employee relations, and Associate Provost Jay L. Halio, who spoke on academic and faculty concerns; and University treasurer J. Robert R. Harrison, who talked on accountability and the erosion of institutional independence. In addition the chairman of the University's Board of Trustees-Dr. Samuel Lenher - spoke on the governance of colleges and universities; John Brook, special assistant to the president, covered politics and higher education; and Don Nelson reviewed the advanced technology that will become available in higher education.

UNL: DID YOU HAVE ANY OFF-CAMPUS GUESTS?

DSM: We invited two members of the Delaware Postsecondary Education Commission, a representative from the College Entrance Examination Board, a director of the American College Testing Program and community college counselors, among others. They covered such topics as state planning for postsecondary education, accreditation and eligibility for federal funds and community colleges and counseling the nontradional student.

UNL: DO YOU THINK THE STUDENTS BENEFITED FROM THIS TEAM-TEACHING?

DSM: Three examples come to mind of how this course faciilitated the exchange of firsthand knowledge between the guest lecturers and the students. Larry Gladieux, author of Congress and Colleges, attended one of our classes as a representative of the Capitol Hill scene. John Brook discussed the state scene, and I the college scene. The week this class met, a bill regarding federal financing of higher education was before the Congress. President Trabant asked me for advice on the bill to give to Delaware congressmen, and memebers of the class had an opportunity to see higher education legislation in the making. Another chance for exchange occurred when Dr. Lenher visited the class. Students participated in a valuable give-and-take dialogue, and by the end of the session, both he and the students had a clearer understanding of each others' perspectives. Still another session afforded these prospective teachers and administrators a chance to gain firsthand knowledge of a subject with which they have had little experience- the community college system. Through the visiting community college counselors, the students enchanced their understanding of this important part of postsecondary education.

UNL: HOW DID YOU BENEFIT, PERSONALLY AND/OR PROFESSIONALLY, FROM THIS EXPERIENCE?

DSM: Devising and then teaching "Issues in Higher Education" enabled me to draw some broad conclusions about the benefits of teaching for an administrator. I found that teaching allows administrators to become attuned to the thinking process of students, while at the same time helping student affairs professionals and administrators bridge the gap between faculty and the administration. I think it also gives the administrator an improved sensitivity to academia, and allows him or her to keep current and to maintain the position of being informed within the field. Teaching also allows a professional administrator to maintain a proper perspective of the University and his or her service to it. In some ways, it provides a welcome break from normal administrative duties, and, I think, results in a healthier view of the institution. I am very grateful for the opportunity to teach.